CHRISTIAN DRAMA

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founded in 1929 *by Sir Francis Younghusband, K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E., and Mrs. O. Stevenson*

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Editorial

" THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING will be held on November . . . in the Board Room. . . ." This kind of announcement never sounds very exciting, nor does it usually arouse an enthusiastic wish to attend. We find that the greatest difficulty is in convincing our members that the Annual General Meeting is *their* meeting, held for the discussion of all matters of importance, and not a secret conclave of the " shadow cabinet " in the crypt of Church House ! To make the meeting this year of more general interest and to give members the opportunity of meeting informally, the Executive has accepted several suggestions put forward by Councillors. If you turn to page 20 you will find details of this. The Executive hopes that members will attend in great numbers and bring their soap-boxes with them.

Plans for the International Conference are now well advanced. Invitations have been sent out to men and women of distinction in the world of Religious Drama from many countries, and a programme of addresses, reports and discussions is being arranged. Demonstrations of English Religious Drama will be presented to the delegates, including performances by the New Pilgrim Players. The English delegation will be led by the Lord Bishop of Chichester and Mr. E. Martin Browne, and Mr. T. S. Eliot and Mr. Christopher Fry will pay visits to the Conference.

I would ask all readers of this journal to study carefully page 21, and so assist us in the smooth running of our business.

The New Pilgrim Players finished their summer season in mid-June. Plans are well advanced for their autumn and winter programmes. Members should know, however, that the financial position is such that unless we find several hundred pounds between now and the end of August, the company will not be able to re-open. We ask for the prayers and the active co-operation of everyone who realises the ever increasing value of the work that the Company is doing for God in this country. This is not an appeal for your donations, but for help in finding new sources of financial support.

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Church and Theatre

by DAME SYBIL THORNDIKE

(During her visit to New Zealand last year, Dame Sybil Thorndike addressed a large congregation in St. Paul's Church, Auckland. The address appeared in the New Zealand newspaper *Church and People*, and we reprint part of it here by the kind permission of Dame Sybil and of the Trust Board of *Church and People*).

"I WANT TO SAY a little about the contribution the artists of the world can make to the community, and the service they can render to the community. I know it is often said that the theatre is a worldly place, a place where you go simply for entertainment and for an 'ear-tickling,' but the real vocation of the theatre goes very much deeper than that. My father was a priest and he would often say : 'Our lives are very much alike ; you spend your time trying to perceive other people's lives and to get inside their characters ; I do, and have to do that, too, and in addition have to see why they do this and that. The difference is that I can show a way to overcome their problems and difficulties, and particularly difficulties of their inside selves.' Now the theatre does not admit to doing that. I know, however, that the Church of England is taking a great deal of notice of the important part the theatre can play in life, and in that way is finding it a service.

" The theatre has to present life as the dramatist sees it—it does not matter whether it is the highest or the lowest of the land. Then with the piece of life it takes, it can be like a microscope ; however minute the piece of life might be the microscope is capable of enlarging its size. With such a vision, and with the gift of imagination, the theatre can throw a light on some particular aspect which may not have been seen in ordinary existence. People often wonder at my liking to play some particular sort of person, but my work is not to pick and choose. An actor has to take the character he is asked to perform and dig down within himself to find a common meeting ground with that particular person. It does not matter whether he or she may be people such as the Macbeths (those who wronged but achieved success never mindful of whom they hurt in the achieving of it, or the damage they did). It does not matter how degrading or exalted the part may be, or how humiliating, one still has to find a common meeting place for that person within one's self.

" The interested and responsive audience partake of the same nature as the actor. They have to become merged in the lives of people perhaps very different from themselves ; the problems of those people become their problems. It is not the same as reading about people who are suffering intolerably or who have been through great, sinful, unhappy times. One can, for example, take Shakespeare (who presents characters of the very highest and the very lowest) and you can find in them some enormous help for your own life. It is when you

have identified yourself with the lives of the poor, and the glorious, and have felt and seen through their own eyes, that you can look at these characters through the eye of understanding, and know they are not only your own brothers and sisters, but more. An actor can never say there is a single person in the world he cannot see and know—and that is a dangerous thing to say if you do not have something to counteract it. To cite the Macbeths again (such terrific people, possessed of brains, wealth and power yet they used it for their own aggrandisement) ; if I was to put myself deeply into the part of Lady Macbeth, the immersing could be maddening and dangerous if there was not something to counteract that. But at the same time as I am Lady Macbeth, at that very time I am outside looking at her from another angle. You see how an actor must be the person and at the same time, God looking at that person ?

" To play a selfish person one must identify one's self completely with the selfishness and then look at the character from a higher angle. I prefer to call the other angle, God looking at the person. You know, it can be a very humiliating experience to realise that one could conceivably behave as some of these characters do but it is a road of understanding.

" It is just as the Russian philosopher Yvsensky said : ' Every day go out with your basket in the morning to do your shopping ; go into your greengrocer's shop and buy your carrots and have your whole being thinking of the carrots and potatoes you are buying and which will constitute your meal—be absolutely in that woman but at the same time go up higher and higher, and see this lady, you, from a higher angle. See her in pity and see her rejoice, but have an understanding of her.' That is what we actors try to do. We do not point the way but we say, ' This is life as we see it.' We do not say that this is the way to go. That is the Church's concern. The Church can tell us how to recover from suffering and to rejoice.

" I have learnt from human beings, I have seen them perhaps more clearly than I could have in the ordinary way of life. In that way all of us are actors when we can see people through the eye of understanding. We can never despise our fellow men. We do realise how each one of these creatures is a child of God and as we do this we show forth this other way. As we in England perform our drama, so our English character is portrayed. An art of a country is an expression of what the people are. We in England show what we are through the medium of our theatre. The people of France show their individuality, and their art, and therefore show another sort of life. When we act a French part, we have to sink ourselves into the French attitude. There are many nations we may find hard to understand, but if we look at the nations through the eye of the supreme artist, God, then we cannot rule out any one nation ; we must love them.

" People often ask if we are not annoyed when asked to act a part that is not a nice one, but the moment personal jealousy comes into it the actor's work is damaged and he or she is unable to perceive

things bigger than himself. Shaw has expressed it most poignantly in his play, ' St. Joan,' where on the River Meuse Joan is addressing Robert de Baudricourt :—

' You must not talk to me about my voices.'
' How do you mean? voices ? '
' I hear voices telling me what to do. They come from God.'
' They come from your imagination.'
' Of course. That is how the messages of God come to us.'

" We, as Christians, should have a personal understanding of other people ; then we are an outward and visible sign of something else. Then we have a sacrament within ourselves. I always feel helped by the Quakers ; their doctrine is sacramental as everything they touch has a significance of something else. If they light the fire, it is the light of the spirit ; if they eat, it is food of God, and so on. Therefore, our every doing should be infused with the spirit of God."

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TALKING OF . . . .

. . . Obscurity in Dramatists

" For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle ?

So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken ? for ye shall speak into the air. . . .

For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified."

St. Paul (*I Corinthians, ch.* 14, *vv.* 8, 9, 17).

. . . Plays in Church

" Our courteous Lord willeth that we should be as homely with Him as heart may think or soul desire. But let us beware that we take not this homeliness so recklessly as to leave courtesy."

Dame Julian of Norwich.

. . . Casting

" *The Confessor* : . . . Now there's Tabitha . . . one of the quietest and devoutest girls in the school. Why couldn't she have been the Magdalen ?

The Producer : She's a worse actress, Father. She does much better as Sloth. Mary makes a finer show.

The Priest : But she's not so pious.

The Producer : If piety can't act, Father, piety ought not to be in a play. . . . You must forgive me ; every one of us to a proper job ! "

Charles Williams (*Judgement at Chelmsford, Episode IV*).

. . . Hazards of Production

During the production of a Nativity Play at a country Church in West Suffolk, a local boy was obtained to lead in the donkey used by Mary and lead it away when she had dismounted. At the Dress Rehearsal, he was handed a carrot to make sure that the donkey came in. Still no donkey appeared on cue.

" That won't come in, Miss," said the donkey-boy. It was pointed out that he had been given a carrot.

" I've et that, Miss " he said brightly, " but that didn't do that donkey no good. That wouldn't shift for nawthen."

. . . Advertisement

This eye-catching announcement is taken from a local magazine for November, 1954 :

" In these days, our eyes and ears are accustomed to publicity from Hollywood heralding each ' novelty ' such as 3-D, Cinemascope, Cinerama, Stereophonic sound, and such like. It is therefore with mischievous pride that I can tell you how we in the Religious Drama Group are going to prove that Hollywood is 'way behind the times —six centuries late, in fact.

" The play now in production is the *York Nativity Play*, a fourteenth-century traditional Christmas ' mystery.' In this play, we shall not use just a wide stage, nor a three-sided one, but a four-sided one—the whole building, in fact. The sound, like the action, comes from all over the place, for the good citizens of York knew more about the third dimension in sight and sound in 1354 than Hollywood does to-day.

" Need I add that the costumes are in glorious colour ? " . . .

Need we add that " on the night " the church was full ?

Let There Be Life

by CARINA ROBINS

The Bible is often used in dramatic form to tell the story of the Nativity or the Passion, or of the revelation of God through the Old and New Testaments. Passages are selected and spoken by a Reader while the cast mimes the story, assisted by music. This method is sometimes chosen for a church which has had no previous experience of religious drama, and the players are members of the congregation with little or no experience of acting.

While on the one hand we realise the potential teaching value of this method, we must also be aware of its dangers. If we accept the opinion of some theologians that *nothing* must be added to the Bible story, then there are very few incidents which could be acted at all. This article is written to help those who think it legitimate to dramatise the Bible for the purpose of presenting its truth. First then we need to be clear as to what God is saying through the Bible story, and secondly, to find every available wisp of material which may be used to bring the characters and incidents to life. Unless we can make the story live we had far better leave drama alone.

A

Let us analyse one short scene as an example of the work that the producer must do long before he meets the cast.

THE SCENE: ABRAM RECEIVES HIS FIRST CALL FROM GOD—(Genesis ch. 12, 1-5.)

At first sight this appears to be unpromising dramatic material. Here are described two contrasting ways of tackling it.

FIRST METHOD

Reader (in sonorous tones): "Now the Lord said unto Abram" . . .

Enter Abram's family diffidently, (a congealed lump of humanity attired in striped and flowing pseudo-Eastern raiment. Turkish towelling conceals their expressionless faces) while Reader continues " . . . and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

—Abram and family wait uncertainly

Reader concludes: "So Abram departed. . . ."

and the Lump departs apatheticall

This method is lifeless.

SECOND METHOD

(1) *The Producer studies the script.*

(*a*) What is the purpose of the scene?

The calling of the chosen people.

(*b*) What is the story ?

God speaks to Abram, telling him to leave his country, to become a great nation. God blesses Abram and his seed. Abram obeys, departing with his family and their substance.

(*c*) What is (i) The beginning ?

Abram is discovered (with his family).

(ii) The climax ?

God speaks to Abram.

(iii) The end ?

Abram obeys. They depart.

(2) *The imagination is brought to bear on the script.*

(*a*) *The Characters.* How many may we legitimately introduce ? Abram, Sarai and Lot, who are mentioned in the Bible (spelt in this way), to which we may add as many relations and slaves as circumstances require.

(*b*) *Atmosphere.* Where shall we set the scene ? Well, we know that Abram was a born leader, but one who became a tent dweller. What is the occasion ? We are told that he was 75 years old when God called him, so this might be the birthday festivities. It would have been too hot to celebrate till sundown. So we now have decided upon : Inside Abram's dwelling. Birthday festivities. After sundown.

(*c*) *Characterisation.*

Abram : According to Bible times, seventy-five years was not old, so we may think of him as in the prime of life. He was the head of his tribe, and must have had a powerful and distinctive personality. We know that he was obedient to God. So there is no doubt about his being a great man.

Sarai : We know little about her, but the name means " contentious." I suspect that she had plenty of personality and a strong will of her own, which could lead to disagreement and even to a tussle at times ; but she would love her husband, so there would be no real disharmony.

Lot : We know that he was Abram's nephew, and that he must have been an ambitious adventurer, and ruthless. This gives us plenty to built on. I imagine him as " tall, dark and handsome," rather too pleased with himself and a little impatient with Abram and his prayers.

Three girls who dance : They should be young and attractive, thus adding to the gaiety of the occasion.

Other relations : We already have material for a lively little scene, and now we may add an assortment of relations, old and young. Each can add to the variety by presenting

contrasts of character such as arrogance, boredom, gaiety, obsequiousness, etc.

Slaves : Should they be happy and contented, or wretched ? I think the former.

(3) *Build up of Scene.*

Beginning Family gather and talk, entering from several directions (happy and carefree). Lot enters, apparently slightly bored with the birthday festivities, but he cheers up when the drinks come round. Abram enters from up stage, with Sarai behind (graciously). Prostration of all before Abram, and rise. Sarai claps for slaves, who bring in drinks and fruit. While refreshments are taken, girls dance with timbrels.
Family cluster round Abram for the birthday toast.

Climax As flagons are raised, Abram hears God's voice. (Reader).
All action is suspended while family gaze at Abram (bewilderment).
Abram moves apart and prostrates. Family whisper together (uneasiness).
Abram signifies obedience to God.

End Abram rises, and tells the family of God's command, and orders them and slaves to prepare for the journey. They scatter to collect their substance. Lot and the girls signify joyful anticipation. Sarai registers acute annoyance. Abram cajoles her to submit. The family collect, carrying their possessions. Sarai evades Abram, and returns with a family god. Abram is horrified, seizes it, and dashes it to the ground. Each onlooker reacts according to character. Abram calls the tribe to prayer (upward gesture) and leads them, singing, off stage.

Note.—These closing incidents are suggested to give humour and vitality to the scene, and a contrast to the quiet and holy climax. It may well be that the scene as here set out is too long when seen with the whole play, and in that case the dance can easily be omitted. But it is important that every scene should be long enough to be really interesting to the audience. This means that there must be some development of story in it, and development of character. When faced with the task of trying to present the whole Christian Faith in one play or pageant, it is small wonder that the compilers give us an endless stream of short scenes, but dramatically this is very bad and the audience loses interest. With the help of flexible lighting and the minimum of props, the scenes must flow swiftly, providing an endless pattern of variety of incident, action, mood and pace.

The Reader is of prime importance. We must not only be able to hear all he says without strain, but his voice must express the changing pattern of mood and emotion, the players taking their cues from him. If he is reading from the Bible there will be a danger of his reading in a monotonous voice, and this quickly produces a " piano " note into the play, killing vitality. He must be rehearsed in his reading (however many thousands of times he has read the words before) until it comes to life.

Music is essential for a Biblical mime, but I cannot go into it in this article. Enough to say that it must be chosen and rehearsed with infinite care, whether it consists of organ only, organ and choir, orchestra or gramophone. May I refer the reader to the pamphlet " The Use of Music in Religious Drama " by Christopher le Fleming.

Designing : If the setting is a church, no scenery is required, but for guidance on costume, I suggest the two pamphlets by Stella Mary Pearce—" Approach to Design " and " Designing for the Nativity Play."

B

By the time the producer meets his cast every detail of the play should be fully alive to him, so that he can interpret it in simple clear language. The players need not be bothered with the intricacies of intellectual study, but they must understand the purpose, the story, its shape and climax, their own character, and its relationship to the others.

But however vivid this play has become to them, if these players are inexperienced they will have no idea as to how to set about acting. All their enthusiasm will melt away in a paralysis of self-consciousness, and the stage will be encumbered with " a congealed lump of humanity."

The producer should teach these good people how to use their bodies to express—through the use of their imagination—occupations and the carrying of objects in mime, sensations and emotions which could be relevant. So start your rehearsals with exercises :—

1. Relaxation and loosening up.
2. Occupations—typing, washing, hammering, etc.
3. Sensations—heat, cold, exhilaration, weariness, etc.
4. Emotions—joy, fear, sorrow, etc.

Who is the person who is expressing all these things ? Probably, at first, it is the player himself. Then comes the next stage, when he imagines a certain type of person clearly, and then does these actions and expresses these moods as that person.

Tell a short story and get the players to mime it. Bring them in in pairs, and make the others guess what the pair are doing or suffering, etc. Of course, music is an enormous help, either a piano or a gramophone.

Help the cast to realise that everything expressed on the stage has to be *larger than life*. They must be able to show their character and

mood so clearly that an audience sitting far away, under great disadvantage, could understand and enjoy the scene.

You may notice that in my description of both the first and second method, I have indicated the mood of the moment, i.e., diffidently . . . happy and carefree . . . bewilderment . . . for it is essential in all acting, especially mime, that the audience should be clear as to the atmosphere. Only too often we are given quite the opposite impression as to what is intended, which accounts for so many of our plays being dreary and lifeless.

Most of us find it easier to act modern characters than ancient ones. We are far too inclined to think of Biblical people quite " other " to ourselves ; pious dreamy figures who could not possibly have had to battle with temptations as we have to ; in other words, what Miss Dorothy Sayers calls " Stained glass window decorum . . . sacred personages standing about in symbolic attitudes and self-consciously awaiting the fulfilment of prophesies."

We must bring them out of their stained glass, and imagine them as full-blooded three-dimensional human beings, upon some of whom the Grace of God is seen to work. So the producer must do all he can to stimulate the imagination by relating this historical character with someone comparable in modern terms. As an exercise, it may help to transpose the whole scene into the 20th century.

Now let us take some incidents in the scene which will need careful practice.

ENTRY

Always most important. Each character should convey something of his personality and mood and his standing in relation to the others, by the way he first walks in. At once the audience should catch the atmosphere and so be expectant of what is to follow.

Abram's entry. Grouping will be important here, so that Abram can command a key position. His dignified bearing and the prostration of all present should signify his importance.

Slaves' entry. They must learn to mime the carrying of trays laden with fruit, and more trays containing drinking flagons. Everyone must practise the mime of taking a flagon, drinking, and putting it back on slave's tray, also the taking of fruit and eating it.

Climax. It takes hard work on the part of the producer, and a lot of practice before the climaxes of any play are really effective. When they lose their significance the whole thing tends to be flat. So be careful of grouping, gesture and timing. The Reader's part is particularly important at this moment.

Ending. After the climax the pace should increase. Each person is reacting to the situation according to his character, and Sarai provides the comic element. Everyone must know exactly what she is carrying away with her, and where it is to be found. And so the players exit, still in character.

NATIVITY PLAYS

I suggest you now take the story of the Shepherds in the Field and work it out along similar lines, and so on with each incident incorporated in your mime.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

He is the central character in all our plays. We have to work through many weeks in order to free our minds and bodies so that the Holy Spirit can take possession of us and reveal truth through us. We must try to be supple in His Hands. Then, and only then, can He breathe LIFE into our play.

CARINA ROBINS

Notes on a Stage Fit-up

by REV. PETER BULLOCK FLINT

1. GENERAL

THE AIM OF A PARISH HALL fit-up must be to make something as flexible as possible, within the limits imposed by the size and shape of the hall and platform, position of doors giving access to platform, amperage of electrical power available, position of power input terminal, and of course, finance.

It must be remembered that no permanent fit-up will ever completely satisfy the requirements of any two plays, there must therefore be some compromise. A stage which is intended primarily as a concert platform will require curtains all round, a majority of flood lighting with two or three tracing spots or arcs. A stage intended for secular plays will require mainly spot lighting from the front of house, and No. 1 bar position, fixings for flats, and could do without a sky cloth. A stage intended for religious drama may very well have curtained wings and a few set pieces, but must have a cyclorama or sky cloth, since the majority of religious plays are either symbolic in setting or have an exterior setting. It should be decided which is to be the principal use to which the stage will be put, and equip accordingly.

Certain books will be found helpful in designing a fit-up, particularly "Stage Lighting for Amateurs" Peter Goffin (Muller, 7/6), which contains useful chapters on sight lines, the design and construction of lighting apparatus, wiring, switchboards, etc., as well as instruction in the use of the apparatus.

Also helpful :—

" Home Made Lighting Equipment " Angus Wilson (Deane 4/6).

" The Improvised Stage " Marjorie Somerscales (Pitman).

" Curtains for Stage Settings " Frank Napier (Muller, 7/6).

" Basic Equipment " (B.D.L., 6d.).

" Stage Lighting " Geoffrey Ost (Herbert Jenkins, 5/–).

All these books are included in the Religious Drama Society' library.

In the notes which follow it is assumed that the stage will have a playing area 15ft. wide by 12ft. deep, and will be chiefly used fo religious plays, but will also be required as a concert platform. Price (where quoted) are approximate only, as they change without notice.

2. SCENIC FITTINGS

(*a*) As noted previously, I consider some form of sky backing essential for religious plays. This could be either

i. The back wall of the stage suitably colour-washed, provided it is quite flat and free from any marks where the scouts have leaned poles against it, or the girls' club have bounced a ball against it, even accidentally.

ii. A curtain designed to hang flat against the back wall.

In either case the surface must be matt. If painted, use a flat oil bound or water paint and make sure there are *no* brush marks (spraying is ideal). If fabric, use a rough surfaced material (serge is ideal but bolton twill can very well be used) using a flat seam at the selvedges. The colour of the cyclorama may be pale blue or palish grey. A blue sky cloth does not usually require such high power lighting, but does not take the subtler tones of dawn and evening light at all, and may play tricks with the colours of projected effects. Grey is therefore to be preferred, but requires much more power in the blue lantern for ordinary daylight scenes.

(*b*) *Surrounding curtains*

i. Wings : These should be mounted on bars hung from the grid by a pivot ; they may then be used flat, or pivoted to form projecting wings of various angles. On a stage 12 ft. deep you will need one 6 ft. curtain and two 5 ft. curtains, or one 5 ft. and three 4 ft. curtains each side. These figures are only approximate. Exact requirements depend upon the width of the playing space and may be determined by drawing a scale plan, and drawing in the sight lines from the extreme ends of the front row of the audience.

ii. Traverse : One or two sets of traverse curtains will be required. These must run the full width of the stage, be mounted on some form of railway and equipped with draw cords. If the railway can be mounted on a bar which can be adjusted to any depth

of stage, one traverse will be sufficient for most purposes. If the traverses must be fixed, two will be required, one at the half stage, and one at the full stage depth. The traverses may be cut as a pair of curtains overlapping 12 ins. to 18 ins. at the centre. A better, but slightly more expensive, method is to make the traverse in separate widths of 5 ft. or 6 ft. These may then be hooked up on the railway to form a pair of curtains with entrances between the curtains wherever there is a break. Each individual width must be overlapped at least 9 ins. and all curtains must be weighted (hence the additional expense referred to). The advantage of this method is that it gives more entrances through the curtains, separately they may be used for pillar or tree trunk effects, and they will mask the edges of set pieces (doors, windows, balustrades, etc.) set off centre.

iii. Colour : Considerable divergence of opinion exists on this subject. The ideal is double thickness curtains, light one side and dark on the other, but this is expensive. Many people advocate a neutral shade (fawn, beige, grey, etc.). This is safe but insipid, and since your audience will often see them, they will soon tire of them. Further, since these are pale shades, they will pick up every scrap of reflected light, clearly defining the playing area, and making it virtually impossible to give an illusion of space.

The stronger colours have the disadvantage of limiting the colours which may be used with them in the costumes. The writer has used a strong green with great effect, but does not think he would like it at all times. A deep blue is very useful, being a primary colour, it may be brought up anything from purple (for Herod's court) to green (for a fantasy) under lighting. It will absorb reflected light from spots, so may be used for large exteriors. It will throw up any set pieces put against it, but is too heavy for a modern interior (though this difficulty may be overcome by skilful use of set pieces and lighting). Avoid the reds, which are essentially warm and so cannot be used for a " cold " scene (e.g. early dawn, tragedy) and the yellows (which include some shades of fawn) as they will come up an insipid green under " daylight " lighting. My advice would be, if you want to be safe, use grey ; if you are willing to work for effects, use deep blue ; if you can afford it, use double sided grey (or fawn) and blue. In any case test a pattern of material under various coloured lighting, including plain artificial light, before you buy.

No colour except black and white (and the greys which are made only from a mixture of pure black and white), is harmonious with every other colour. Therefore, any colour for the background is bound to limit the choice of colours for costumes

and set pieces. In combination with some other colours, apparently neutral colours such as " fawn " or " beige " can produce discords which are just as insistent as those produced by clashes of brighter colours. This limitation must be recognised, but can be overcome by carefully designing settings and costumes which " go with " the permanent background.

v. Material : Generally speaking the heavier the better, provided it is not a shiny surfaced cloth. Velvet is the ideal, heavy bolton twill is a very good substitute, some of the heavier cotton-rayon mixtures will do if suitably weighted, but most cottons, or synthetic materials (rayon, nylon, terylene) are not yet sufficiently developed to serve as stage curtains.

3. PROSCENIUM

i. This may be constructed of curtaining, but is much better made of hardboard or plywood (there is little difference in the cost eventually). Plasterboard or beaverboard are *not* suitable. The proscenium should be carried right up to the ceiling if possible, and it is helpful to have a portable proscenium which can be removed entirely to give an open platform, or set at half stage depth (this effect is a refinement, not an essential).

ii. Stage ceiling. Some form of masking for the ceiling will be required. The normal method is to use borders (i.e., pelmets) about 2 ft. deep hung at intervals across the stage). These should be made of the same material as the wings. The interval between them will depend on the height of the stage, and may be determined by drawing the sight lines, as for the wings.

An alternative method is to fit a permanent moulded ceiling which slopes upward from the back to the front of the stage and may be made of canvas. Properly handled this can be very effective both for interior and exterior settings.

iii. The front curtain should if possible be a thick, heavy curtain lined with a lightproof material. This will deaden back stage noises and prevent any working lights on stage showing through the curtain, but if the front (audience) side is lit heavily enough to counteract the working lights, you can use anything, including hessian. It is well worth while to invest in the professional type wooden bobbin railway for the front curtain, *not* the standard house pattern metal railway as sold in curtain shops. This (the bobbin type) will reduce the noise of curtain operation and minimise the danger of the curtain jamming. It is much more expensive to install, but is easy to maintain, seldom if ever needs replacement of working parts, is very robust, and will prove much more satisfactory and economical over a period of years. If you cannot afford this, the Rufflette heavy curtain railway is the only satisfactory alternative. A curtain wind

is an unnecessary refinement if your budget is limited. It cannot easily be used with a portable proscenium, but it has the advantage in a permanent fit-up of enabling the use of wire rope (with consequent reduction in wear).

4. LIGHTING EQUIPMENT

Again, no permanent fit-up is ever completely satisfactory even in the professional theatre. Cost is usually the limiting factor, but this can to some extent be overcome by making as much as possible of your own equipment. The disadvantage of this is that amateur built equipment is nearly always less efficient than professionally made, sometimes as much as 40 per cent, which means loss of illumination for quantity of electricity consumed, but this may be reduced by following professional practice in the construction of the optical system. Study a few professionally made spot and flood lanterns, and obtain a copy of Strand Electric's catalogue and price list. This contains useful data sheets on all their equipment. As an indication of comparative prices, a 500 w. spotlight costs £11 10s. complete, but could be made for about £5. 150 w. floods cost £4 12s. complete but could be made for 30s.

General considerations : In order adequately to illuminate the actors on a stage roughly 15 ft. by 12 ft., about 1,500 w. will be required. This allows no flexibility in the system, and no lighting for the sky cloth. In order to make the system flexible, a further 1,500 w. would be required and the sky cloth would require about 1,000 w. Thus the total installation would have a power of 4,000 w. (i.e., 20 amps.). Since the total power would not all be in use at once in a normal production, it would be possible to load it on to a 15 amp. input circuit, provided there is no danger of any unauthorised person switching on every light.

The units you would require are :—

Sky cloth batten ;
No. 1 batten ;
Front of House trough ;
Switchboard.

(i) Sky cloth batten. The simplest method is to use a compartment batten fitted with the three primary (or sub-primary) colours, each separately controlled. It is then possible to flood the backcloth with any colour by mixing the primaries in the correct proportions. The disadvantages are firstly that the lighting is flat over the whole cloth (but this will only worry the perfectionists among producers, and they will be able to devise ways of overcoming the difficulty) and secondly, cost. This system ties up three dimmers, which must be permanently allocated to the batten, and will not be available for use with other circuits (*vide* inf. (iv)). A convenient batten could be made up with two 6 ft. lengths (eight compartment) magazine batten (Strand

A235 reflectors) having 5×100 w. bulbs in the blue circuit and 60 w. bulbs in the orange and green circuits, each circuit controlled by an S.S.15 dimmer. Cost £43 10s. (from Strand Electric) or about £22 10s. home made.

As an alternative method you could use a series of floods filtered with gelatines suitable for each individual scene. This is a much less flexible, but much cheaper method. For example 2×500 w. floods with switchgear would cost about £21, or could be made for £10. Something half-way between this and the batten system would be 7×150 w. floods costing £30, or home-made for about £10.

(ii) No. 1 batten. This will be the main lighting used for concerts, etc., and will also be used for some plays. On a small stage it is best fitted with narrow angle floods (e.g. Strand pattern 237 with hood attachments) *not* magazine batten. A useful fit-up for a 15 ft. by a 12 ft. stage would be 7×150 w. floods, hood attachments for which cost 13s. 9d. each.

(iii) Front of house trough. This is essential on a shallow stage to light the actors right downstage. It should be mounted if possible so that the light strikes the stage at an angle of 30° to the horizontal. Spotlights must be used and since they are inaccessible during the performance, the more you can afford the better. A useful fit-up would be 2×500 w. spots and 4×250 w. miniature spots, and for lanterns of this power the bar should be mounted between 12 ft. and 18 ft. from the proscenium. Cost from Strand Electric complete with switchgear about £70, but you could well make this equipment for about £40—£45.

(iv) Switchboard. Allowance has been made in the prices quoted for dimmers to operate the lanterns in ganged units. The ideal switchboard allocates a dimmer, two-way and off switch, and fuse to each individual circuit, but this is obviously expensive. Since the dimmers are the most expensive single item on the board, a method of reducing the expense is the so-called "Junior" board, where each circuit is provided with a socket into which a dimmer may be plugged as required. It is thus possible to share one dimmer amongst three or four circuits, and if the play demands it, hire additional dimmers to plug into existing circuits. There are two disadvantages :—

(*a*) This type of board often requires two or even three operators to work a rapid cue.

(*b*) Since adjacent dimmers frequently change their loadings it is often difficult even for an experienced operator to remember which dimmer is controlling which circuit.

An alternative method is to allocate each dimmer to a given group of circuits and equip each circuit with a cut-out switch. Thus a given dimmer can only be used for a given group of circuits.

(e.g. dimmers a. and b. are always used for F. of H. spots). The disadvantages are :—

(*a*) An inexperienced operator may overload the dimmer (not a very likely danger) or he may bring up full a whole group of lights loaded onto the dimmer by incorrectly switching another circuit.

(*b*) The addition of hired dimmers requires a major alteration to the board wiring.

For myself I prefer the alternative Junior method, but it must be remembered that neither of these methods can be used for a sky cloth compartment batten, but either could be used with sky cloth floods (*vide* sup. 4 (i)). The switchboard can well be wired by a local electrician. The circuit switches *must* be *silent* in operation (e.g. " Mutac " type). The fuses should be located in a convenient accessible position on the board, and a few spare fuse bridges provided and kept ready loaded. A board master switch must be provided, but need not be silent in operation. A board master dimmer is highly desirable, but not essential.

It is not advisable to try to make your own dimmers. Wire wound slider dimmers of the type you will require cost about £4 each and are capable of handling from 30% below to 30% above rated capacity. Liquid dimmers are not recommended for general work as they are cumbersome, dangerous and inefficient, owing to a tendency to boil when held on a prolonged check, but a large liquid dimmer may be used as a board master, provided it is correctly installed.

It is desirable if possible to have the auditorium lighting controlled from the stage board, if necessary by using two-way switches, but there must in any case be a means of controlling auditorium lights from behind the proscenium. Regarding the size of the board, assuming that you will use one of the Junior types of board, and flood lighting for the sky cloth, a fit-up such as I have suggested above could well be controlled by four or five 500 w. dimmers (Strand pattern S.S.15), the total cost of which would be about £25 or £30 (assuming that the wiring is done by a volunteer) but if bought from Strand Electric, £65.

(v) Wiring. The wiring from the board should terminate in sockets conveniently grouped alongside the lanterns, so that any one lantern can be plugged into a number of different circuits. This will facilitate removal of lanterns for cleaning and adjustment, and make it possible to gang lanterns together on one circuit in different groups, according to the requirements of the play. For a fit-up as suggested, I would recommend four circuits to the F. of H. trough, and three circuits each to the No. 1 batten and sky cloth batten. It is also desirable to provide a number of additional sockets in the wings at back and front of the stage. These may be located either on the grid (which I prefer on a small

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Do you know . . . . ?

1. That as a member of the Society you are entitled to nominate members for election to the Council, provided the nomination reaches the National Secretary *seven* days before the date of the Annual General Meeting.

2. That as a member of the Society you are entitled to make nominations for the Sub-Committees, provided the nominations reach the National Secretary *ten* days before the Annual General Meeting.

   NOTE: The Sub-Committees are:
   (*a*) *Play-reading, publications and Library,*
   (*b*) *Conferences and Schools.*

3. That the Executive have decided that the Annual General Meeting on Friday, 18th November this year will be held at 11 a.m. to be followed by an hour's buffet lunch which will give opportunity for members to meet and talk about matters of mutual interest. The lunch will be followed by the meeting of the Council which all members are invited to attend though only Councillors may vote.

The office asks you to note

1. PERMISSION TO PERFORM : That a difficulty sometimes arises because permission to perform a play has not been requested until a late stage of rehearsal. *In no circumstances* should it be assumed that permission to perform will be granted automatically.

2. PERFORMING FEES : Why performing fees are payable on most plays. Briefly, they are almost always part of the author's living. We like to encourage authors to write good religious drama but many of them find it quite impossible unless the work is financially rewarding.

   Most religious plays are given either as acts of worship or for a worthy charity and often no charge is made for admission, but authors' agents, including R.D.S., are not in a position to waive or reduce fees.

   That when you send the performing fees we need to know the place, date and time of each performance.

3. REVIEWS : That we are always glad to see newspaper cuttings about your productions but that we can not use them for "Christian Drama" without the written permission of the newspaper concerned. Readers of "Christian Drama" will note that there is a constant tendency among those who send reports merely to praise enthusiastically. It would be of greater value to us all if they would send more balanced accounts considering the debits as well as the credits.

4. REMITTANCES : That unless the exact price and the postage are known beforehand we prefer you not to send a remittance for sales orders until you receive the goods with our invoice.

5. RECEIPTS : That we do not issue receipts for amounts less than 5s. unless a 1½d. stamp is enclosed.

6. ORDERS : That all new copies of books not published by R.D.S., or for us by S.P.C.K., have to be ordered specially for you. We are pleased to order for you but regret that the books are not returnable.

7. COSTUMES : That a number of garments (mostly for children) of the Stuart period, and such miscellaneous items as straw hats, "Puritan caps," etc., are still available for sale second-hand at the R.D.S. office. Interested members are invited to call, or to ask for a list to be sent them.

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stage) or on the skirting of the side walls. They should be grouped on at least one, and preferably two, separate circuits each side.

5. CONTRACTING FIRMS

(*a*) *Lighting Equipment* : A list of firms who supply this can be found in " Theatre Directory : Suppliers and Organizations " (Stacey Publications, 1s.).

(*b*) *Curtains and grid equipment* : Again reference should be made to " Theatre Directory."

If you have a builder or carpenter in the congregation, I should tell him what you want for the grid and let him make it either with solid timber, or wooden box beams. It will be much cheaper and quite satisfactory. The curtains can well be made by a few ladies with sewing machines, as it is *not* necessary to have a fine hand finish on stage curtains.

SUMMER SCHOOL

Have you booked yet for the Summer School at Culham College, Abingdon, near Oxford, from Monday, 22nd August to Wednesday, 31st August ? As this goes to press there are still a few vacancies—especially for men.

The tutors are :—

For Production and Acting :
Cecil Bellamy, Marion Watson, David MacOwan.

For Costume and Scenic Design :
Norah Lambourne.

The Chaplains are : Prebendary Basil Guy and the Rev. Robert Duce.

The College is in pleasant country and delightfully situated near the river, with facilities for bathing and boating. The programme allows time for relaxation and excursions, which include a river trip to Oxford.

The terms are from £8 8s. to £13 13s., and there are special terms for students under thirty, including a limited number of bursaries.

Application forms can be obtained from this office.

Those who have been with us at previous schools will be glad to know that Mr. Norman Ayrton (now Vice-Principal of L.A.M.D.A.) and Miss Geraldine Stephenson, solo dancer and choreographer, are visiting the school on the first evening to entertain us with a dance recital.

Arrangements have been made also for students to visit the Stratford-on-Avon Memorial Theatre, to see a performance of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

The New Pilgrim Players

THREE YEARS IN RETROSPECT

by LAWRENCE PEAT

TIME IS A STRANGE THING. To the first offender three years would seem like a lifetime, but to the old lag just a short sentence. In relation to the history of the world even a hundred years is a short time. All this is prompted by the thought that I have spent three years working with the Society's professional company, THE NEW PILGRIM PLAYERS, and I hope I may be forgiven if, for a moment, I glance over my shoulder and recall one or two impressions.

" Refreshments will be provided "—somehow a crowd of memories are linked with food. The first day when eight complete strangers met around a cup of tea and a bun in Church House, Sheffield. We were all a little afraid of each other and shy, and this was not helped by an enthusiastic reporter who called, and wanted to know *all* about us. The three weeks of rehearsal were soon over, and we were then very much in action.

I believe I could recite *Holy Family* from start to finish without a script for it is difficult to erase the memory of over 150 performances. We owe much to R. H. Ward who wrote this play with real understanding of the sort of place we should have to present it in. He allowed us to use the play for some months without fee, and this act of kindness was the forerunner of many, not least the ice cream man in Sheffield, who, on seeing the play, was so impressed that he offered us free transportation of our equipment to all the performances in the area. This really did make life possible, as it was six months before we had our own truck.

Even " truck " is a tribute to the vehicle which we finally used. It cost £50 and, although a little decrepit in appearance, it had a heart of gold and an engine which rarely gave up. We used it for many thousands of miles, and then finally sold it for £25 after nearly two years of hard wear ! I vividly remember a journey from Liverpool to Bournemouth in June. Even in a luxury coach it would have been a long journey, but on hampers in the back of a three-ton furniture van it was a marathon—and it wasn't our feet which were affected !

When we first read Mrs. Baxter's industrial play, *T'Other Shift*, I think we all realised that we had something unusual in our hands, and as the scheme developed and we discussed the play with the people who had helped to write it, our enthusiasm grew. I must say we were all very nervous. As far as we knew no one had tried to present a play about factory life on the workshop floor before, and we had no idea of the kind of response we were likely to receive. We need not have feared. They laughed at the jokes and revelled in this picture of themselves which they found all too true.

For two nights a week we did not play, and each member of the Company went off to produce a play with a local amateur drama group. We all compared notes next morning ! The task was not an easy one, for to produce a play in ten weeks with some very raw material is not my idea of a holiday. It was a wonderful idea and a rewarding experience for both producer, and, I hope, produced. I am sure that as soon as the Society can afford it this scheme should be reintroduced.

" Can we afford it ? " These words have an all too familiar ring. In spite of a great deal of kindness from many people, money has been a constant problem. It costs over £100 per week to keep the Company running and this takes some finding every week. With a good week, when the local organisers have done their job and the weather is right, we can make ends meet ; but it only needs one bad performance, or one person to cancel a booking, for us to be " in the red." Rehearsal periods and free weeks eat up a lot of money and there is the cost of staging new productions. Before we can re-start this autumn we must find some more money, and I feel sure we shall.

After a year of acting with the Company, I took over the Advance Management and this has occupied me—sometimes a little too fully—for the past two years. I can't pretend that it is the easiest of jobs, and if things go wrong, the poor advance agent is probably to blame. " If only the posters had arrived sooner," says the harassed organiser " we would have had many more people here," but he neglects to point out that it took him several weeks to make up his mind to order them.

On my tombstone will be written the words, " You know, this is quite the wrong time of the year," for no matter what time of the year one suggests it is, inevitably, the wrong one ! However, there are compensations, and the sure knowledge that someone has got to do the job ! Everything really depends on local organisers, and we are gradually finding a team of people all over the country who know what we are trying to do and are prepared to help us. Basically, of course, our task is to help them. To present the Christian truth in the best possible way is the thing to which we are all committed—but sometimes we become bogged down in our own activities and the inevitable boiler fund.

It has been a great privilege to be able to present four new plays in the past two years and we wish we could have presented more. These plays will be made available to amateur groups in time, and we hope in this way to have played our small part in helping to remedy the shortage of good religious drama.

I remember sitting in a hall in Leicester watching a rehearsal of *Christ In The Concrete City* and being staggered by the sheer power of it. Many thousands of people have now seen this play and there can be no question about the wonderful way it " gets across." The other night I watched an audience of young people, tramps, toughs and older folk who were seeing this play, and once again I was amazed at the ability of this play to speak to all sorts and kinds of people.

Our most recent addition—*Showdown*—is quite the most amusing religious play I have ever seen. The first few minutes are spent laughing at religious drama, and the play goes on to laugh at the world and the Church. Underneath the fun it attempts to make people think about the relationship of work to worship and it is brilliantly successful. I laughed until the tears rolled down my cheeks, but time and again I had to acknowledge that a point had been well and truly made.

Three years is a particularly long time to carry the responsibility of production and I cannot finish without a word of tribute for the director, Miss Pamela Keily. Without her it is almost impossible to imagine THE NEW PILGRIM PLAYERS, for much of the policy comes from her vision, and things are not " policy " for very long with her, for she has a remarkable gift for pushing them through to the end.

We hope to start again in October, but before then we are giving much thought to the task which we face. What exactly is the job of the Society's professional Company in the light of three years' experience ? What sort of people do we need for the Company and where shall we find them ? Where shall we find the money to put us on a firm footing ? These, and many other questions have to be faced before we go on—for go on we must, for I am convinced that there is a job for us to do, and I hope that those of you that have seen us agree.

Peterborough

" UPON THIS ROCK "—A Dramatic Chronicle by James Kirkup.

by CARINA ROBINS

THIS PLAY CHRONICLE was presented from 3rd to 14th May in the Cathedral with a large cast of amateurs, led by a few professional actors and actresses. Music was composed by Roy Teed and played by the Peterborough Philharmonic Society Orchestra.

This play celebrated the thirteenth Centenary of the Abbey of Peterborough, and of the Cathedral which succeeded it.

Here we saw in dramatic terms the history of this great Cathedral, and James Kirkup's imaginative verse and prose flowed easily. He carried us through the centuries, and the inevitable sequence of episodes, without once presenting us with an extended history lesson.

" This is the springtime of the year " is the opening line of the play, and so the story unfolds, showing the repeated struggle of good and evil for each succeeding generation. " The end of the world grows near " is a phrase used over and over again, and yet in spite of evil, goodness endures through a deep and abiding faith.

The scenes are linked together by the Chronicler at the lectern, and

this part was played superbly, as one would expect, by Robert Speaight.

There are two weaknesses in the script, the first being that evil is not sufficiently emphasised. It is hinted at on many occasions—for instance when the Danes invade—but if these moments had been intensified in the writing in contrast to the " good " scenes, the play would have been stronger.

My second criticism is that the play ended abruptly without being brought to a satisfactory conclusion. The last dramatic scene is that of Cromwell and the Commonwealth. This is followed by a fine sermon on faith delivered by the Chronicler, after which a procession brings it to a close. It would seem that this is too late in the play for a sermon to have its full impact, and one feels that use of the chorus here might have strengthened the ending.

Christian Simpson is well known as a television producer, and one can imagine the difficulties with which he had to contend when putting on such a huge scale performance. On the whole, he deserves real praise for his achievement. He made good use of the entire building, from the moment before the play began when a boy in a bright green tunic ran, ringing a bell, right round the nave, to the frequent use of all three aisles, not only in processions but for groups of chorus and crowd.

A vast stage had been built in front of the choir with a long raised aisle leading right up to the east end. I was a little surprised at the flatness of the stage, and though the producer made full use of the fine flights of steps leading up to the stage, unfortunately the action taking place on these steps was invisible to a large number of the audience sitting far back in the nave. Effective use was made of a triptych in the chancel, against which figures were silhouetted, and at one moment there was a magnificent cut-out of the Cathedral itself thrown against this background. The lighting was most imaginative, and some good effects were given by the skilful use of darkness, candlelight processions, and so on. In one scene spotlights were thrown up to the walls and roof of the building, and as they moved around all the beauty of architecture was revealed to us.

Audibility, or the lack of it, must be mentioned. I was present on the second night, when it was obvious that the microphones were not being used to their best advantage, and though I was fortunate enough to be sitting in the third row, even so quite a lot of the dialogue was inaudible to me. Further down the nave this must have been much worse. No doubt these troubles were overcome to some extent during later performances.

It seemed that the producer was in his element with scenes such as that of the death of Katharine of Aragon (who was played by Ellen Pollock), which, though rather too long, was beautifully acted. More action in the scenes of invasion and battle might have taken place on the main stage. As it was, these were over too quickly as the bad characters chased the good characters down the aisles to disappear into the darkness.

It is hard to summarise the acting, but at least I can say that, led by the professionals, much of it was exceedingly good. Mr. Warren Lamb gave us an example of what could be done with skilful use of movement and characterisation, in his varied performances as the Devil, the Hart, the Leper, and Pedro. One of the loveliest moments was when Mary, Queen of Scots (Geraldine Stephenson) moved silently down the whole length of the Cathedral to her execution, and in the next scene the torchlit cortège proceeded back up the nave. This was a moving performance by the complete cast in timing, colouring and mood.

The verse-speaking chorus played an important part, but one could have wished that their lines could have been more broken up, both in the use of voices and in grouping. On the whole the words came across with clarity, and this is high praise, for we all know what a difficult medium the chorus is.

There were most exciting moments in the crowd scenes, and yet I felt that a great opportunity had been lost. Little interesting grouping was attempted, and much of it was out of sight. The dramatic climaxes were so often worked up to a dramatic pitch and then thrown away. It seemed also that the players had not been sufficiently warned of the need to sustain their characterisation from the moment of their first appearance until their exit, wherever they might be in the Cathedral: invasions and processions were sometimes treated too lightheartedly as an amusing bit of play-acting, and so lacked conviction. Nevertheless, in general the producer's control of his vast groups was imaginative and at moments powerful.

A large orchestra and choir were hidden somewhere in the transept, and the music came across with great beauty, and played its rightful part in the whole performance.

The costumes, designed by Stella Mary Pearce, were a joy to behold. It seemed that they interpreted the mood of the play within the framework of the stately architecture of the building. My only criticism would be that some of the costumes were too tight and made of too thin material. In the earlier scenes they seemed to lack the necessary roughness. St. Chad looked more of a poet than a monk. But these are minor criticisms, and the experience of skilful design must have been a revelation to many.

It is easy to criticise, but my general feeling is one of great admiration for the Dean of Peterborough Cathedral and all who supported him, for gathering together this group of artists, and for giving them such an opportunity of using their various gifts to the glory of God. We know so little as yet of how to use our churches and cathedrals for dramatic presentations, that every performance must be in the nature of an experiment. I hope that many who travelled from different parts of England to see one of these performances will feel inspired to consider the possibilities of this medium, and grateful to Peterborough Cathedral for the opportunity to see this play.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

* Added to the stock of the Library.

NEW PLAYS

But They Won't Lie Down. Stuart B. Jackman. (S.C.M. Press, 5/–). H. 3 one-act plays : (*a*) The Backyard Miracle. 7m., 1w. (*b*) The Prototype. 3m., 2w. (*c*) The Blind Man. 3m., 3w.

Reviewed in " Christian Drama," Spring, 1955. (Fee : Apply publishers.)

***Children of Jerusalem.** Irene Caudwell. (S.P.G., 1/–). H. 3 scenes. 7b., 7g., 3 angels.

An Easter play for children. Competent and attractive, though the cheerful play of the children and the solemnity of the events they witness do not quite cohere. (No fee.)

***Death Is My Beginning.** Meriol Trevor. (Typescript.) HX. 3 scenes, Prol., Epil. (Time : approx. 1 hr. 50 mins.) Large cast. Verse.

Produced in Bristol Cathedral, 1954.

A young girl has just learned that she is mortally ill. She enters a church to work out her problem, where she is joined by Belial, who counsels despair, and then by the Archangel Raphael. He shows her the Christian triumph over death : " As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

Special music can be obtained on request. (Fee : apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

***A Dream Come True.** Ivy Russell. (From a book by E. Calcraft.) (C.M.S. 9d.) H. 5 scenes. 3b., 8g., supers.

A short mime play for children, telling the story of a schoolgirl in Uganda. (No fee.)

The First Nowell. I. M. Oxley. (Epworth Press, 9d.) 14b., 1g., angels and choir. HX. (Fee : apply publishers.)

***The Healing Cross.** Ivy Russell. (S.P.G., 6d.) H. Large cast (doubling possible.)

A short mime play on a missionary theme, for senior children or adults. (No fee.)

***I Was In Prison.** Morwenna R. Bielby. (Epworth Press, 3/6.) H. 3 acts. 4m. (or 2m.), 12w., 3b.

A pleasant full length play about Elizabeth Fry, her prison work and her family, showing her slightly idealised but not over-sentimentally treated. Except for some telescoping of time in the last act, the play is faithful to fact.

The second act gives a vivid and strident scene on the " women's side " in eighteenth century Newgate, which contrasts well with the gentleness and good humour of the Fry household. (Fee : £1 1s., 15/–.)

***In The Same Hour.** Lesbia Scott. (Highway Press, 1/–.) H. Cont. act. 15 char. (at least 4 m.), voices, singers.

A dramatised sequence on the work and urgent needs of overseas missions. Representatives of many lands are introduced into the framework of a valedictory meeting ; with obstruction from the Parish Pump.

Suitable for Missionary Work functions. (No fee.)

***A King Is Born.** S. T. Hartshorne. (Religious Education Press, 1/–.) H. 8 scenes. Large cast (with doubling, 13 char.).

This unpretentious Nativity play was written for an end-of-term performance by teachers, and can be recommended for older children and adults.

The play's approach is historical and realistic, setting the Nativity against the stormy political background of the times, in the manner of Dorothy Sayers' " Kings in Judea." The dialogue is in natural modern English.

Some production notes are included. (Fee : 2/6.)

Little Friend. W. J. Cowen. (French.) H. 6m., 5w., supers. 3 acts. (Fee : £1 10s.)

The Little Red Tree. Glyn Griffiths. (French, 1/6.) H. 1 act. 4m., 1w. (Fee : £1 1s.)

***Mirage.** T. C. Thomas. (Deane, 1/6.) H. 1 act. 8m., 9w.

The City Wall of Jerusalem on Good Friday. A rowdy, motley group assembles to see the procession pass by to Calvary, among them a blind beggar who receives his sight. Strongly written : good " atmosphere." (Fee : apply publishers.)

***The Mob.** Joyce Reason. (Independent Press, 1/–.) H. 3 scenes. 1m., 6b., supers.

A colloquially written Easter play about a gang of tough Jerusalem street boys. (Fee : apply publishers.)

***Noblest Adventurer.** Lesbia Scott. H. 3 acts. 4m., 3f.

An original treatment of the life of St. Boniface.

A modern family (father, mother, grown-up son and daughter) meet St. Boniface and his chaplain, and are persuaded to learn his story by acting in scenes from it. The " inset " scenes depict the Saint's career from his first call to his martyrdom.

The son of the family, initially hostile, is shaken out of his indifference. " We believe in God. What do we do about it ? "

The eighth century story is thus related to the present day, and a large cast of characters reduced to a manageable number. Though written for a special occasion, the play should be of wide general interest. (Fee : apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

***The Palace Of The King.** A. A. Baker. (Highway Press, 1/–.) H. 1 act. 4m., 1w., 2 attendants.

A parable in fairy story form. The K ing of all Mankind has lived in a succession of palaces that crumble. The Apostle Thomas arrives, and offers him an everlasting palace—with surprising results. (Fee : apply R.D.S.)

Morning In Bethlehem. F. M. Hurt. (Epworth Press, 9d.) H. 1 act. 4b., 2g., children and choir. (Fee : 2/6.)

Sing Noel. Geraldine Middleton. (Epworth Press, 6d.) H. 1 act. 19 char., angels. (Fee : apply publishers.)

***The Spirit And The Truth.** F. New. (Hugh Quekett, 2/–.) H. 1 act. 2m., 3w.

On the Third Day, Pilate and Claudia hear rumours of the strange happenings at the tomb. Claudia sends for Mary Magdalen who tells her story.

A simple one-act play for a group of limited resources. (Fee : £1 1s.)

The Three Kings. A George Hall. (Gray's Inn Press.) H. 3 acts. 20m., 2w., supers.

Reviewed in " Christian Drama," Spring, 1955. (Fee : apply publishers.)

***We Live Again.** E. Leonora Elliott. (Independent Press, 1/–.) H. Large cast of women. Cont. act.

A Pageant of the women of the Bible. (Fee : apply publishers.)

REFERENCE LIBRARY

***Drama In School And Church.** K. M. Lobb. (Harrap, 7/6.)

An introductory survey, mainly of the use of drama in schools from medieval times to the present day. One chapter contains a brief account of the work of T. S. Eliot, Christopher Fry and others in religious drama.

***Gothic Fashions In Women's Dress.** Olga Sronkova. (Artia, Prague.)

A beautifully produced book on European dress in the middle ages, with many full page plates (some in colour), and enlargements to show minute detail; this should be of great importance as a reference book for designers.

SETS NOW AVAILABLE

Easter Scenes, by H. M. Richards. (Typescript.)

Good Friday, by John Masefield. (Heinemann, 4/6.)

Light Is Come, by Thomas Doran. (French, 2/–.) Readings only.

Thor, With Angels, by Christopher Fry. (O.U.P., 7/6.)

I Was In Prison, by M. R. Bielby. (Epworth Press, 3/6.)

FAR AND WIDE

Beckenham, Kent

Two performances of **In Three Days** were given in Holy Trinity, Beckenham, this year. This is a favourite Easter play with this group of players, who first performed it in 1951.

Technically the players managed to hold the balance between the intimacy needed by a scene set in a room and the projection needed for a performance in church. This was particularly successful at the second performance in the scene between John and Peter.

At the close, the Vicar read prayers in the darkened church, and it was a fitting conclusion for a true act of worship.

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Beverley, E. Yorks.

On 19th, 20th and 22nd April, Cherry Burton Youth Club presented the morality play, **The Castle of Perseverance,** in Beverley Minster.

The young people were all under 25, drawn from all walks of life : boys from Repton and Uppingham, shipyard apprentices, farm workers, girls from offices and school, and one who had won a scholarship to the Guildhall School of Drama.

Rehearsals were held in a loft, the Club's meeting place, until the company moved to the spaciousness of the beautiful and venerable Beverley Minster where the play was given.

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Bickley, Kent

The Bickley and Widmore Guild of Players presented two plays at the Church Hall, Bickley on the 3rd and 4th of February. The Guild made use, for the first time, of " Arena Theatre." The plays chosen were **The Apple Tree** by B. M. Clegg, and **The Boy with a Cart** by Christopher Fry. The former filled as it is with homely, somewhat earthy humour, proved to be the perfect foil to Fry's brilliant verse-play.

The Apple Tree was competently acted with particularly strong performances by Caedmon, the Abbess and the Devil (the latter appearing in accordance with the best theatrical traditions accompanied by a brilliant flash and considerable quantities of sulphurous smoke). The beauty of the extracts from Caedmon's poems stood out in splendid relief against B. M Clegg's homely dialogue, and these lines were particularly well delivered.

The Boy with a Cart is, of course a much more difficult play to perform but it was, on the whole, well acted The central figures—Cuthman and his mother—were both played with ability and sincerity, and they received splendid support from all the other characte actors, with Alfred and Demiwu supplying some excellent comic relie One felt that the chorus could have bee more effective than it was, the delivery in some cases, being somewhat lifeless

The performance on both night must be considered among the bes the Guild have produced for many years.

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Birmingham

The Coronation of Christ.

The congregation who attended even song on Palm Sunday at Christ Church Burnley Lane, were privileged to witnes an Easter mystery play presented wit simplicity and sincerity and that use the advantages of the church settin to the full.

Opening in the uncertain gloom o the hours of the Crucifixion, the actio of the play moved between Emmau and Jerusalem, and so carried th congregation with it in spirit that it climax, with the realisation of th Resurrection, brought its message t eager and receptive hearts. This wa indeed a true preparation for Hol Week—*From the Parish Magazine.*

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Holy Trinity, Brompton

Three years ago, I wrote an en thusiastic account of Miss Ursul Nicholl's production of **The Way of th Cross,** by Henri Gheon, in this church This year I saw much the same pro duction directed by Miss Joan Nichol who on the previous occasion wa one of the players. I was greatl impressed again : we had the skilfu arrangement for 14 characters (instea of five as intended by the author), an in general the same interpretation but it was obvious that producer an cast had pondered deeply on th meaning, until a depth of spiritua

maturity was reached, which gave the performance its added power. It is a superb play capable of endless variety in production, and with no limits to its power of re-interpreting the meaning of the Passion. No wonder that some groups perform it year by year as a form of meditation, but we rarely see a production with such life and power. Holy Trinity, on these two occasions, has set a fine example.

Carina Robins.

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Chelsea

It is not often I wax lyrical over an amateur show, but not many possess lyrical quality to inspire me. The Junior Dramatic Club of the Carlyle School, Chelsea, did, in Fry's **The Boy with a Cart.** Youthfulness is too often made the excuse for inadequacy ; here was Perdita's true daffodil quality. We had a young cast (average age thirteen), a young poet and a young producer showing a young hero saint building a young church. Never have I heard the verse so *joyously* spoken, nor the grave and the gay blended so unselfconsciously together. That the players were girls we had forgotten from the moment of Cuthman's entrance.

Besides beauty—and linked with it all the time—the production had such *zest.* Those girls were obviously enjoying every minute of it, and giving the whole of themselves to it. I came away wishing we had more plays of such quality about Saints and Heroes.

J.P.

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Chichester Diocese

The Legend of Baboushka was presented by the Canongate Players in Easebourne Church after Evensong on 30th January.

They were fortunate in having a raised chancel and sanctuary, and so to escape most of the problems of visibility which beset church productions. They had rather more difficulty in overcoming the acoustics, but on the whole, they succeeded.

The play was given the naive sincerity of the legend from which it is taken, by a cast who gave the impression—adults and children alike—of a real understanding of their parts. The final procession was a really moving sight, and there must have been many to echo Baboushka's cry of " My Lord and My God."

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Christ's Hospital, Horsham

A tour of **Murder in the Cathedral** was made during the severe weather of January and February this year, by the Pilgrim Way Players, a composite group drawn from the Bluecoat School, Christ's Hospital, Horsham, and the Women Teachers' Training College at Eltham. The players visited churches in Sussex, Kent and South London, including one performance at St. Thomas', Regent St., and one in Southwark Cathedral.

If anyone arrived at one of these performances prepared to make allowances for the young, he must very quickly have been won over. Each player attacked his part with enthusiasm, and a large measure of understanding, though the technical abilities of the group varied. Becket was impressive, a truly saintly and dignified figure, though he did not carry quite enough guns for the part ; this Becket, one felt, could have sat in sackcloth, but never on the woolsack.

Nevertheless, the production was a worthy achievement of which the whole group may be justly proud.

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Dorchester

A simple but impressive Easter play, **In Three Days,** was performed in the Corn Exchange, Dorchester, by the Drama Group of the Dorchester Y.W.C.A. This Group has specialised in religious drama since 1950. Each year they produce a Nativity play, and now plan a production three times a year.

The standard was high, and everyone who took part helped to make clearer the true Easter message. There was Mary, for example, calm, composed and strong in her faith that her son would conquer death. And, as a contrast, Peter, ashamed of his denial of Christ and plunged by his death into the depths of remorse. The best scene was when the news came that the tomb where Jesus had been taken was empty, and Mary's unconquerable faith was justified.

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East Malling

In February the Franciscan Players of East Malling gave the fifth and last of their cycle of New Testament Plays, **More than Conquerors,** by Raymond Birt and Reginald Soar. The previous plays had shown the preparation for our Lord's coming, His Birth, Ministry and Death. This year's play gave the story of one of the chief of those who carried out Christ's commission. Beginning with the death of Stephen, we saw many of the salient events in the life of St. Paul terminating with his imprisonment in Rome. Underlying the action could be felt the thoughts and the inspiration which gave the Apostle his position of leadership. A happy thought made St. Luke speak the Prologue and connect the scenes with narrative. The play was given with that high standard of production which we connect with these players.

These plays have become an established event and attract coach-loads of people from all over Kent. It is to be hoped that the Players will continue after the year's respite which they have planned.

K.B.B.

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Frizington, W. Cumberland

Last year St. Paul's Drama Group, Frizington, ambitiously attempted the morality play, **Everyman,** though few members had had previous experience of amateur dramatics. Its success surprised them.

This Easter the players tackled an even more ambitious play with a religious theme : Joyce Biddell's **Gates of Hell.** The general standard of acting was high, a credit to the players and their producer.

Miss Biddell spares neither face nor fortune. She ridicules to the point of farce the petty forces which she believes are so sapping the vigour and sincerity of the Church that holiness of thought and deed are lost in the welter of trivial living.

In the end she lays the whole weight of the Church, its morality, destiny and place in civilisation, in the hesitant arms of modern youth. She has no solution to offer—merely a challenge to make before it is too late—for the struggle is still on.

Musty stuff this, you say ? Not a bit of it. In fact, if **Gates of Hell** failed to put over its message, it must have been only because it was such excellent entertainment.

—*From Local Press.*

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Hall Green, Warwickshire

For its third production, and at the request of the Church Missionary Council, the Hall Green Baptist Church drama group produced **Wherefore this Waste ?** on 2nd April.

This comparatively young Society gave a creditable performance, and praise is due to all taking part, particularly to the producer for his excellent casting, and to the players of the parts of the Bishop and Libbet.

Good religious plays are not easy to find, but this play provided much inspiration and food for thought.

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Huddersfield

For four nights in May, the Huddersfield Branch of R.D.S. presented **I Was in Prison,** a three-act play by Morwenna Bielby in the Parochial Hall, Springwood Road.

I Was in Prison tells the story of Elizabeth Fry, the great Quaker prison reformer. In the first act comes the request for help with the prisoners in Newgate. The second act is set in the prison, and in the last act we see something of the results of her work. In every way the second act is the strongest, and this tends to put the play off balance.

The settings and costumes were effective, and the whole presentation brought credit to the Branch. The production occasionally lacked pace, especially in the more difficult first and third acts, but the grouping in the Newgate Prison scene was good.

Here is a straightforward story of a great Christian woman, well presented with no attempt to seize the opportunity to "preach" at the audience. The play relies on actions rather than words to point the moral, and this is its great strength. To the average drama group it will appeal on this ground and also because the cast list is full of women with only a few men.

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Kentucky, U.S.A.

Margaret Hall School, Versailles, Kentucky, presented a translation of a hirteenth century Easter play in St. ohn's Church this year. Teachers nd girls took part. The play showed he visit of the Maries to the Sepulchre, he Appearance to Magdalen, and the Harrowing of Hell.

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angton Maltravers, Dorset

The Apple Tree was performed at angton Maltravers on 2nd and 3rd Iarch by the St. George's Players : his was the first production by this ompany since they produced their Iativity play, **Mary the Mother,** in he Crypt of St. Paul's in 1952. The art of Caedmon was played with ncerity and considerable dramatic orce. All the other parts were well ustained, and the whole effect seemed o be much appreciated by keenly nterested audiences.

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incoln

According to the Scriptures and **This ock,** at St. Mary-below-Hill, Lincoln.

The former play is not an easy one o interpret, as so much depends on mphasis of a particular word, or onal variation, and as so much of he speaking is choral, we anticipated ifficulty in maintaining that perfect ming essential if the congregation was o hear and follow the play.

By dint of concentration on this spect, we were able to learn afterards that the words were clear and risp throughout.

A single spotlight followed the cast own the aisle, and beamed on the ght foot stark wooden cross borne y the leader. The unusual nature f the play appealed to the congregaon, and it was a remarkable contrast o the other short play, **This Rock.**

The two plays have been selected or presentation at the Lincolnshire lergy Conference at Butlin's Camp, kegness, during June.

It has been our custom over several ears to present a play during Holy Veek, and we feel that this year, we ave come nearer to the purpose of this orm of drama than we have done beore.

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Liverpool, St. Mary's, West Derby

Henri Gheon's **The Way of the Cross** is truly liturgical drama, a profound meditation in dramatic form. It has therefore the attributes both of drama and ritual.

The gains achieved by increasing the actors from four to twelve far outweighed the loss involved—a diffusion of the feeling, a slight weakening of the stark economy which characterises the author's conception. Unless the four are highly expert in voice and gesture, trained to extract the last nuance from every word and situation, undoubtedly the larger number is more effective.

The cast must be praised for their clarity. Their movement and gesture were generally fine and many telling moments were achieved in their sudden alarms, dejection and despair. The decision to set the play within a shortened form of Holy Communion was altogether appropriate for **The Way of the Cross,** a work which is obviously the fruit of profound spiritual experience.

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Manchester

Good Friday football in Lancashire is a matter for reverence and awe. A group of young men and women in the Parish of Atherton, in the Diocese of Manchester, have for two years tried to redirect these twin emotions by performing a Passion Play on the evening of Good Friday. This year **According to the Scriptures,** by Elizabeth Heward, was chosen.

The Chancel steps alone were used as a stage. The final scene of the play is the Resurrection scene, and here the sanctuary was used as the tomb and the Cross itself, representing the Body of Christ, laid on the Altar. Music greatly enhances the atmosphere of this play, and we recommend the two recordings we used—the Introit from Anerio's Mass for the Dead sung by the Sistine Chapel Choir, and the Kyries and Sanctus from Palestrina's Mass for the Assumption sung in Dijon Cathedral by their choir.

We enjoyed the production once we had mastered the form, and the play was well received. But lest we should believe that we have the last word in such things, a Lancashire housewife deep in daffodils and decorating string said the next day, "Eee they did it

lovely, but I'd sooner have a story to it somehow, luv."

Prophets have no honour. Perhaps they say the same thing to Stanley Matthews every Good Friday.

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Marfleet, Hull

Miracle, by G. R. Myers, was performed on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday by the St. George's Players, the drama group of the local A.Y.P.F., in St. Philip's Church, Marfleet.

The story of the play tells of a disillusioned leper whose outlook on life was radically changed, and also of the lame man who was healed at the Beautiful Gate ; but it is the pressing theme of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of our Lord which gives the play unity and lustre. For the young people, this was the most ambitious production they had yet tackled. In this, the real inspiration for the play came from their own sincerity as Christians, and an awareness of the impact the play could make on an audience during the most solemn week of the Church's year.

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Marylebone

The congregation of St. Mark's, Marylebone Road, had made a promising start in their representation of **The Way of the Cross** last Passiontide. This year they brought to **Redemption** by Freda Collins, increased confidence and greater experience.

Ursula Nicholl gave the play a realistic interpretation which gripped the audience as the drama of the Passion unfolded. The Angels brought out the beauty and meaning of the words, and the chorus showed the emotions of those who surrounded our Lord during those tremendous hours. The chanting of Plainsong in the background heightened the effect.

The fact that through the services of this church the actors were familiar with the Liturgy, no doubt contributed to the sincerity of their interpretation and also to the devotional atmosphere which surrounded the production.

K.B.B.

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Newcastle-on-Tyne

Local eye-brows rose to unprecedented heights when it was announced that we were to produce Henri Gheon's **The Farce of Devil's Bridge** and Christopher Fry's verse play **Thor With Angels** as a double bill, with a totally inexperienced cast of worker " Geordies."

The Farce of Devil's Bridge, based on the legend of St. Kado and his Cat, gave us an opportunity to entertain and amuse at the expense of the Devil who so hates being laughed-at. And the cast gave good performances, and we were glad to see that this sort of play, in the tradition of the Medieval Mystery Plays, still has a popular appeal.

Thor With Angels is already well known. The cast brought out the message of the play clearly and strongly.

The bold choice of plays was justified. " We have gained, a nodding acquaintance with the Devil, a little history, and a whole lot of joy from doing something together in the Fellowship of the Holy Ghost."

From the remarks of some of those who saw them it is quite clear that these were plays which made themselves understood.

They were subsequently toured to six other parishes.

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Newport, Monmouthshire

Way of the Cross.

The parish church, Holy Trinity, near Newport, was mysteriously destroyed by fire on 5th November, 1949. To make the re-opening week altogether memorable it was the parishioners' wish to see a Passion play in the church on Good Friday, 8th April, 1955, the day after the rededication service.

So last winter was spent in training a new drama group. In spite of the exactions of other work in re-opening the church, the play, on Good Friday, was nothing less than a spiritual experience for those who saw it.

" It had atmosphere and sincerity," an experienced professional afterwards remarked. Yet rehearsals had gone on under great difficulties.

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Norbury, S.W.16

The Women of the Passion, by the Rev. J. G. Davies, was presented as an act of worship at Christ Church and Upton Chapel, Westminster Bridge Road. This play is a simple presen-

tion of the story of Easter as it appeared to the women who were "beholding afar off." Despite its colourless title, it brings the events to life with vivid and direct force. Reported action is compensated by lively dialogue in natural modern idiom.

There is no attempt at subtlety, but the characters are drawn with discernment. We were taken into a Jewish home and saw the impact of the Master on ordinary people.

The scene at Golgotha was deeply moving. It seems to matter little who we are, for in one of the characters we see ourselves, standing at the foot of the Cross.

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Poplar
Mann's End

This short play was performed on a cart in the open air during the Bishop of Stepney's Mission in Poplar in May. It is half an hour's sheer teaching with very little claim to drama but, as such, and in this setting, it cannot be ignored.

The presentation is as follows : a child is baptised, confirmed, given his first communion, refuses to continue in his church attendance, all "on set." He is then killed in an accident at work "off set." There are "on set" his parents (the mother rather feebly inclining towards "religion" the father asking "what do *they* want to be paid?"), with three Temptations (Pride, Lust, Ambition), and Conscience, who are ever present and ever active but unseen by the family. The local clergyman directs Mr. and Mrs. Mann's attention towards the Church and when the boy is killed visits them and presents them with a challenge to Christianity. Through his agency they, for the first time, see the four people who have always lived with them and come to recognise that something higher is required of them and that it is through their lack of example that their son had failed to maintain his hold of religion. "If you don't go to church why should I have to ?"

This "Theatre in the Market Place" seems to be a coming medium and a technique of presentation will have to be devised bold and possibly crude enough to offset the disadvantages of an open fronted cart-stage, curtains wildly blowing in the wind, voices following them, pedestrian and bicycle traffic and the accompaniment of youthful comment, high, shrill, adulatory and the opposite.

All credit should be given to this cast who so bravely undertook this formidable task and who so nobly carried it through. The door has been set ajar here for a development in evangelistic technique.

U.N.

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Putney

The Putney Church Dramatic Guild gave two performances of **In Three Days** in St. John's Church, shortly before Easter.

Normally, an Easter play must encounter one main problem : how to present a story, in which the physical Presence of a Person is a vital feature, without actually showing that Presence to the spectators. **In Three Days** attempts a solution based on the usages of Greek drama.

The result, inevitably, tends to be static, and makes great demands on the narrative powers of the players.

The company at St. John's, after a rather uncertain start, built up steadily to a climax. They spoke the play's unpretentious modern prose with genuine feeling, and showed by the way in which they tackled it that for them this was a real act of witness.

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Ramsgate

On 31st March at St. George's Parish Hall, Broad Street, Ramsgate, the St. George's Players presented the Passion Play **In Three Days.** The action of this play is set in a room in Zebedee's house in Jerusalem and portrays the feelings and reactions of certain of those closely connected with Jesus during the first Good Friday, the following day, and the first Easter Day.

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Reigate

In spite of many setbacks due to ill-health, members of St. Mary's Parish Church, Reigate, presented a play for Easter, **In Three Days,** on Friday and Saturday, 25th and 26th March, at their Parish Hall.

Under the direction of Miss Peggy Caffyn-Tees much hard work was

done by the cast and stage management team to perform this play with a sincere understanding of the Easter message.

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It was an ambitious and rather plucky undertaking on the part of the Reigate Methodist Dramatic Society to turn to a stage version of Alan Paton's novel, **Cry, the Beloved Country,** which deals so searchingly with the problem of race relations in South Africa. Paton's book is not just about the colour bar. It goes far deeper into the springs of the perilous tension between black and white, which its author finds in a mutual fear that has its inevitable outcome in hate, injustice and violence.

To the producer of the play, compliment is due both for the technical competence with which he directed a team composed largely of young amateurs, and for the impact the production made on the audience. At the close, the audience could feel that they had not been preached at or lectured to but mentally stimulated, emotionally stirred—and entertained ; for beside many moments of poignant drama and compassionate appeal, there was at times a dash of humour.

—*From Local Press.*

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Romford, Essex

Behold your King, by T. Doran.

This play was presented by the St. Chad's Church Dramatic Club on Maundy Thursday, 7th April, 1955.

Beautifully staged and dressed, and sincerely acted, it was a most fitting play for Holy Week, and focused one's attention on the very human frailties of the chief actors in The Trial, The Procession to Calvary, and The Resurrection scenes.

How familiar we are in these times with the official attitude towards present problems. In this play the official Roman attitude is well imagined, and Jesus is described as an agitator who has stirred up discontent among the poorer classes, a ringleader of many riots, and an upsetter of customs such as the trading in the Temple.

The " seeing " of Our Lord by Mary Magdalen after His resurrection is a beautiful ending to the play. Her awareness of her Lord and Master suggested to me that only as we see Jesus with the inward eye of faith shall we most truly understand the measure of His sacrifice so well described and portrayed in this play.

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Salisbury

Sarum St. Thomas' Players, a band of communicant members of the Church, presented **In Three Days** as an act of devotion during Passiontide.

It was played on an open platform in front of the chancel in the country churches of Bishopstone and Broad Chalke. The lovely cruciform building made an impressive setting. At Bishopstone members of the Methodist congregation were invited by the Rector.

The play was twice presented in our own church, and at the Brown Street Baptist Church Hall. At every presentation the close and reverent attention of the spectators was most marked.

The Players made a corporate act of dedication at the 8 o'clock Celebration on Passion Sunday, where special intercessions for a blessing on the play were offered.

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Scarborough. St. Columba's Church

On Wednesday, Thursday and Good Friday in Holy Week the Drama Group presented **The Summoning of Everyman** in church. The stage at the end of the nave had a simple setting of black cubes arranged as steps, and at the base of a large crimson cross which dominated the stage. A golden arch at the Sanctuary steps indicated the speaker for the " voice of God " who was seen through it dimly lighted behind gauze curtains : at the end of the play it became the " heavenly sphere " for the departure of Everyman and the Angel.

Costumes were made by the group out of old materials dyed, the designs for which were taken mainly from a book of thirteenth and fourteenth century pictures. Period music came from two tenor voices and a recorder player.

Five hundred people saw the play.

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Shepherd's Bush

The Man who played Judas, by C. V. Wright, was presented during Passiontide by St. Stephen's Players (Shepherd's Bush), at St. Stephen's, St. Augustine's Whitton and Christchurch, St. Marylebone.

studied movements and gestures seemed to draw out and emphasize the story that was being told. One of the audience remarked, "Never before had I realised all the Scriptures said . . ." Altogether, an advance in the presentation of religious plays in this suburban parish, and also, be it said, in the exercise of the teaching office of the Church.

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Wimbledon

We have recently produced, at St. Matthew's Church, Wimbledon, the Passion play **Redemption,** by Freda Collins. Although we have produced plays in church regularly since 1946, unexpected difficulties arose in connection with this play, for a play of this kind had not been attempted before.

Now, everybody is glad to have had the opportunity to take part in such a play. It was an unforgettable experience. We all feel that we are deeply indebted to the author for the play, which has moved us all.

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Whitstable

Freda Collins' Passion play, **Redemption** was performed at All Saints' Church, Whitstable, on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

The part of the Angel of the Redemption was taken by the assistant Curate, and that of the Angel of Contemplation by a girl who is a member of the Senior Youth Fellowship. It was interesting to see how this casting gave an impression different from that of the former production, when both the Angels were girls.

The young people have by now had considerable training in several plays, and their miming has improved very noticeably. The members of the congregation were responsive, and this made the play a real part of our keeping of Holy Week. A tradition of religious drama is being built up in the church, and among the group of young people who take part.

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Worcester Park, Surrey

G. R. Myers' play **Miracle** was given this year in St. Philip's Church, Worcester Park.

The entire production was "home made," and the first time that the players had given a play of this kind. The result made a great impression upon those who saw it.

Wolverhampton, St. Andrew's Church

A member of the audience writes :

The sacred drama **Christ Crucified** depends so much upon the spoken word for its appeal that its production is beset with unusual difficulties. The long Biblical passages demand a sustained high standard if it is to escape tedium.

From the first words of the play, the voices were clear and audible. The cadences were pleasingly produced and escaped the monotony so prone to that form.

Well dressed and staged with an economy suited to the subject the play throughout showed evidence of meticulous rehearsal, and proceeded with a smooth and unhurried solemnity that could not fail to move the spirit.

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Y.W.C.A. Centenary Pageant

Salute to a Century was the title of the Y.W.C.A. Centenary Pageant which was enacted, under the direction of Miss Diana Carroll, at the Royal Albert Hall on the 21st May.

We were led through a hundred years of Y.W.C.A. development with humour and gravity, movement and repose, realism and dance drama in juxtaposition. Most of the action was in mime with an organ, choir or spoken accompaniment either creating the mood or explaining the action. The standard of acting was high, giving a real sense of period as we progressed through the century. The only set was a kind of super open kiosk centre stage which, by means of "cut-outs," became a reception desk, the seashore, a quay piled with luggage, and many other things as well. The maximum effect was achieved by the lighting, which on occasion formed squares and rectangles of colour which spread and widened, giving the impression of an artist at work with his brush.

A sensitive imagination must have created and welded together the twelve episodes, some of which had been under separate direction in different parts of the country, and the hundreds of players brought it to life. The Y.W.C.A. was founded on a prayer circle a hundred years ago : may it continue in this strength for another hundred. U.N.

concentrating first on the calling of the disciples and the healing miracles, and then more and more on the conflict in the mind of Judas, leading directly to the crisis of Good Friday. The Crucifixion, off-stage, closed the second part.

The remaining third of the whole action was devoted to the Appearances. Often the Resurrection is treated as a brief appendage to a detailed account of the Passion, and therefore never seems quite so real. In this case, and with the Christ actually represented, the down-to-earth verisimilitude of these scenes was compelling—and disturbing.

Gains such as these do much to reconcile one to the representation of Christ in plays, in spite of its dangers. At St. Thomas', no attempt was made to " give a performance," and youth, dignity and a great capacity for stillness strangely conveyed the unseen Presence beyond the actor—who remained a " stand-in " rather than an impersonator.

The professional cast, though not uniformly good, carried the play along with enthusiasm. The tumultuous vitality of the crowd scenes, and the imaginative use of mime (no props of any kind being used) are characteristic of this producer's work, and were a striking feature of this original and continuously exciting production.

B.J.

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Our Lady's Tumbler, by Ronald Duncan, was performed at St. Thomas' in May, by a professional cast. The theme of the play is based on the legend of the statue of Our Lady which would move if presented with a perfect offering. In the Monastery where it is kept, three " brothers " present, on her feast day, the most perfect thing they have created, but the statue does not move. Brother Andrew, who has been a circus clown, " tumbles " for her in the Chapel after the others have left. He falls exhausted, but, undefeated, he makes one last effort to give her pleasure, and breaking himself in the attempt, dies at her feet. Then the statue moves and drops the rose onto his body.

The presentation of the play was delicately handled, and the characters of the three monks drawn with subtle humanity and humour. These three made for interest, drama and contrast, but left, perhaps, a feeling that the spirit of the Order was not on the highest level ! However, Father Marcellus, with his deep spiritual understanding and humanity, brought in a spirit of sanctity.

The playing of Brother Andrew was sensitive and sincere with his love of Our Lady based on utter simplicity of soul and disregard of self.

The specially written music by Arthur Oldham was sung between the episodes, and the opening and closing verses were spoken by single voices with beautiful effect.

U.N.

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Sutton

Miss Jessie Powell's new play, **All the Sons of God . . .** (a play for Easter, Ascensiontide or Whitsuntide), had its first performance at Trinity Church, Sutton, during the evening service on Sunday, 1st May. The play took the place of the sermon, which in length and content it is well fitted to do.

The events following the Resurrection are shown through the eyes of two characters intended to represent, symbolically, two possible attitudes of mind to them. They are the Elder and the Younger Brothers from the parable of the Prodigal Son, the one with a closed, embittered mind, the other groping uncertainly but passionately towards belief. This blending of history and parable is a little disconcerting, but the author's contention that the brothers stand for " no-one—and everyman " is not without force.

The Trinity Players are gaining in experience, and this devoted group gave of their best to convey the full meaning of the play to the congregation.

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Walthamstow

Quietly and unobtrusively, there has been built up at St. Peter's-in-the-Forest, Walthamstow, regular production of Nativity and Passion Plays produced in church. On Good Friday this year, this group broke new ground, for **In Three Days** presented producer and actors with entirely new problems.

Despite the fact that the acting was subdued, the sincerity of the actors in speaking their words, in their carefully

religious drama for both players and congregation, and to the forthcoming visit of the New Pilgrim Players.

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Stroud

Religious Drama Festival : Go Down Moses.

This fine play was produced for the Festival by Elizabeth Jupp. The Parish Church was an excellent setting for a play of such spiritual quality, and the best setting in which to convey those qualities to an audience. A wide and deep stage rose by various levels and gave a necessary sense of light in the background.

The principal parts were ably done, and the actors had a fine sense of the spiritual conflict involved. There were several outstanding features of the production.

First, the Chorus: this was skilfully prepared in four parts with the result that Chorus and individual parts mingled effectively with marked success.

Secondly, the lighting was most professional, and on a scale made possible only by the fact that the play ran for a week.

Thirdly, full use was made of the church. The organ was used, and music written and compiled specially for the occasion. In the miming of the Crucifixion scene, the large crucifix on the rood screen was illuminated, giving a moving effect.

The Festival has become an important event in the life of Stroud Parish Church. In addition to local people, large parties come from a distance.

On the last night, the author, the Rev. Philip Lamb, spoke to the cast afterwards. He made us all realise how well the producer had visualised the tremendous possibilities of this play, and how the cast had succeeded in making some of them a reality.

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St. Giles-in-the-Fields

Saw we a Stranger ? a new play by James Gillhouley, was given its first production at St. Giles-in-the-Fields, in the centre of London, just before Easter. The play is set in the London of the future. Britain is part of the World State, and Christianity a proscribed underground movement. The Christian leader, Richard, lives with his mother and brother, who are unaware of his identity. Michael, the brother, is induced under pressure to spy for the Government, and when he discovers the identity of the man he is required to betray, personal resentment takes possession of him. Richard is arrested, and goes willingly to a death he regards as sacrificial ; and it is not in vain, for Michael repents, and prepares to take up his brother's work.

So far, so good : an exciting story told with brilliant effectiveness and punch. (Though it is not always clear in what way the Christians differ from any other individualistic minority group.) It is in its symbolism that the play becomes confused.

Who is the leader ? Is he Christ himself ? No, for he is described throughout as a Christian preacher, no more, and the story in itself differs too greatly from the Gospel narrative to form a convincing parallel. Is he simply a follower of Christ whose martyrdom resembles his Lord's ? But so many touches suggest something greater : the trial, for example, repeats the Trial before Pilate almost word for word, and Michael and his girl friend have evident links with Judas and Mary Magdalen, while the leader receives a reverence touching idolatry from any Christian standpoint.

This basic ambiguity seriously flaws a play that shows signs of remarkable talent. The author, it seems, is not yet quite clear about what he really wants to say : we look forward hopefully to his future work.

B.J.

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St. Thomas', Regent St.

Brian Way's modern dress production of **The Man born to be King** was transferred this year to St. Thomas' for a series of performances in Easter Week. This change flattened what was essentially an arena production against the east end of the church, with some loss of impact. Nevertheless, the total effect was remarkable.

A cycle of twelve plays had to be compressed into three hours' acting time. In practice, this meant the selection of a handful of scenes, bringing out only a few aspects of the life of Christ, but telling a connected story. Beginning at the Marriage in Cana, the action moved at breathtaking speed,

Credit for much of the success is due to the producer, an actress who readily gives her experienced services.

This unusual play, which won a prize in the Western Canada playwriting competition, has been described as "a Passion Play within a Passion Play," and is worth the attention of any amateur company.

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Skegness

Notable success attended the first production of the newly formed Skegness Religious Drama Group, which presented S. N. Sedgewick's **Barabbas** at the Y.M.C.A., under the auspices of the Skegness Council of Christian Churches.

The world shaking events of the first Good Friday received dramatic treatment in this short but intense offering. The action is built around the Jewish robber leader, Barabbas.

As presented by a cast of players who brought intense sincerity to their parts, the play made a deep impression upon all who witnessed it.

—From Local Press.

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Southgate

For the second year in succession, an Easter play has been produced at the Bourne Methodist Church, Southgate, on Palm Sunday, and it will be surprising if this does not become a regular feature in the calendar at the Bourne. This year **The Coronation of Christ,** by E. Werge-Oram, was chosen. A vivid pattern of hope, despair and exultation is presented against a background of Old Testament prophecy, and familiar as we are with the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, we were given a deeper understanding of the atmosphere and tension of the first Easter.

The colourful costumes were planned and made by the group, and followed the lines of R. Anning Bell's picture, "The Women going to the Sepulchre." All concerned in the play combined to produce a sensitive interpretation.

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Southwark

In March, 1955, Christopher Fry's **Boy with a Cart** was presented for two performances in the Chapter House of Southwark Cathedral.

The cast, which was drawn mainly from the diocese of Southwark, was supplemented by players from other parts of London, and was distinguished by a notable and most valuable unity of understanding and performance.

The Chapter House, though possibly admirable for the uses for which it was designed, does not easily lend itself to the performance of plays. The stage is a mere platform, but the producer, Ursula Nicholl, not only accepted the limitations, but turned them to good account. By the vividness of her conception and the sincerity and ability of the players, the imagination of the audience was stimulated to accept, naturally and without strain, the sequence of changing scene. They followed the journeyings, both physical and spiritual, of The Boy, with such comfortable absorption that they were able to arrive with him at the dramatic climax and share the final realisation of the presence of the Master Carpenter. Though the play may have been familiar to many, the ending did not fail to move and thrill.

The mime was often excellent (men into oxen in particular), but sometimes lacking in variety, notably in the storm scene. Full advantage was not always taken of the well-considered stage decor and the valuable heights provided were not used as well as they might have been to add variety to the sometimes monotonous frieze angle of the pictorial aspect.

The choral speech was an example of what can be achieved by untrained people through constant rehearsal, sincerity and sensitive handling. It was a production and a performance of unity and artistic integrity.

D.W.

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Stretford, Lancs.

Go Down Moses was successfully staged in the Parish Church, Stretford, by members of the Youth Club. It was the first play to be given in this church, and it was well received by the congregation. The youthful Chorus required much training and explanation in their function. They remained, perhaps, rather wooden except before the Golden Calf and when they enter as the Church.

It has been an ideal introduction to